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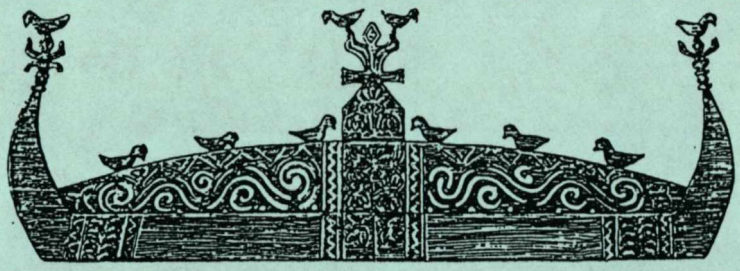
EAST TIMOR

STATEMENT TO THE UN DECOLONISATION COMMITTEE

NEW YORK, AUGUST, 1989



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Statement on the question of East Timor
to the UN Committee of 24, 14 August 1989
by
TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign

Mr. Chairman and honourable members.

As representative of TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign, I am indebted for the opportunity to petition your Committee about East Timor. Our organisation has monitored developments in East Timor since the Indonesian invasion in 1975. In principal, nothing has changed; the country is still under Indonesian occupation and the East Timorese have not yet exercised their right to self-determination. I want to draw your attention to some special features of Indonesian rule in East Timor today.

The cosmetics of opening-up

Last December, in response to persistent criticism from abroad about tight security and difficulty of access, Indonesia declared East Timor to be an 'open' territory. Jakarta defines 'opening up' as meaning that East Timor is now treated 'like a normal Indonesian province'. But as this Committee is well aware, East Timor is not legally a province of Indonesia, it is an occupied country.

Let us look for a moment at what being a 'normal province' means. Last December, General Rudini, the Interior Minister, announced that the two special structures for East Timor: the Coordinating Inter-Departmental Team on East Timor and the Central Team for Development Implementation would be dissolved, meaning that East Timor would now become his Department's responsibility. However, Koopskam, the special military command for East Timor, has not yet been dissolved, clearly because of the continuing level of military operations.

The changes in the administration do not mean that the army's grip on East Timor is lessening. The Interior Ministry is heavily militarised, with members of the armed forces in control at every level. Although the special structures have been dissolved, the administration in East Timor is far more militarised than 'normal provinces'. Colonel Saridjo, for long the regional secretary in East Timor, is now vice-governor, a post that was vacant for many years. Lieutenant-Colonel Hidayat, formerly a regional assistant governor in East Timor, is now district head of Ermera. Other district heads are either army officers or have their military 'minders'.

Mr. Chairman, perhaps the only advantage of the changes for East Timorese is the abolition of the obnoxious surat jalan, the travel permit that was needed to journey even from one village to the next. Governor Carrascalao says that the change is intended to make East Timor more attractive to foreign investors. So now, control of people's movement is exercised by means of the new-style KTP or identity card, issued with the approval of the local military commands. The primary purpose is to distinguish between those living under Indonesian control and those with the resistance in the bush. Recent visitors to East Timor have explained how the new system works. An Indonesian journalist says that on a journey from Dili to Los Palos, about 200 kms, the bus stopped 12 times at police or military posts, where KTPs were checked (*Kompas*, 10 July 1989). Earlier the Guardian correspondent, Juliet Rix, noted military checkpoints every twelve miles. (*Guardian*, 22 February 1989).

The abolition of the surat jalan has not made things any easier for people who are forced to live in the resettlement camps. They are still confined within very narrow boundaries. Anyone daring to go beyond these boundaries, to gather firewood or forage for leaves and other supplementary foodstuffs, risks being suspected of contacting the guerillas and of being beaten up and arrested or shot on the spot.

Mr. Chairman, 'opening up' has not altered the policy towards fact-finding missions. No independent observers have been allowed in, hence no-one has investigated the human rights abuses that continue to be reported. Foreigners arriving in East Timor from Kupang or Den Pasar report that it is like entering another country; passports are checked and new arrivals must record, in triplicate, data about their flight, the purpose of their visit and so on. East Timor is now being opened up to tourists.

Many past and present repressive regimes have allowed tourists in and devised ways of keeping the unpleasant side of things hidden. Now Indonesia is devising its own methods. General Soesilo Soedarman, Minister for Tourism, Post and Telecommunications, announced on 1 June 1989, after long deliberations with the Indonesian Travel Agency and the security forces, that 8 districts are open to domestic and foreign tourists. Five districts - Manatuto, Manufahi, Baucau, Viqueque and Lautem -remain closed because, as government officials put it, 'the infrastructure is not yet ready'. Arrangements for group tourism to so-called Designated Tourist Regions (DKW) will be made in consultation with the Strategic Intelligence Board (BAIS). [*Suara Pembaruan*, 1 June 1989] Earlier, Interior Minister General

Rudini said that foreigners wanting to visit certain areas should consult the local military commander 'for their own safety, because there are still security-disrupting bands in the hills'. [*Antara* 6 February 1989].

Nevertheless with more outsiders visiting East Timor, some people are getting a glimpse of what conditions are really like. An Australian who visited Dili for 24 hours in May saw military movements, physical maltreatment on the street and truckloads of armed troops being driven south of the capital. A recent visitor from Sweden saw and photographed the huge military presence in Baucau and was given details of human rights atrocities during a 24-hour visit to Viqueque. The Indonesian authorities have become entangled in their own web: having decided it was necessary to let outsiders in to prove that they have nothing to hide, we are now obtaining first-hand information about the ugly face of the Indonesian occupation, bearing out what we have been hearing and reporting for years.

Mr Chairman, there have been several state-sponsored visits of parliamentarians to East Timor in the past few months. The 7 UK parliamentarians who went in March and the 8 German MPs who went in June spent only 24 hours in the country. There is a world of difference between well-informed investigators making visits with an agenda to examine human rights, and groups of parliamentarians on brief, stage-managed visits, as official guests of the Indonesian government. The limitations of such visits have been described by the Australian visitor mentioned above: "First, if one did not know what questions to ask and who to ask them of, and if one could not quickly establish trust with informants, it would be tragically easy to learn nothing and draw false conclusions. Second, it would also be tragically simple to visit Dili (which is not East Timor) on a Sunday, stay in a hotel in the business district (and therefore be physically and socially removed from the people), see nothing out of the ordinary and conclude that everything is normal".

A Swedish visitor who travelled from Dili to Baucau in May was horrified to discover that the only accommodation for tourists was the notorious Hotel Flamboyant, which has been used for years as an interrogation centre and torture chamber. It has been renovated for use as a hotel while newly-arrested detainees, including about forty people arrested in and around Baucau in April, are instead being held and interrogated at a new detention centre near Baucau military airport, before being transported by military helicopter to Dili.

In Dili, Becora Prison has been turned into a show-case prison for the benefit of foreign visitors who hear nothing about newly-arrested detainees who suffer violent and unrelenting torture in the headquarters of many military commands such as Korem, Koopskam, Kodim and Koramil, some of which are only a few streets away from the prison.

But the Indonesian authorities are far from united over policy in East Timor. General Benny Murdani, architect of the invasion and now Minister of Defence, opposes the policy of 'opening up'. It is not difficult to understand why. After nearly fourteen years of war waged by a well-equipped army against a guerrilla force with no material support from abroad, Indonesia is no nearer to pacifying East Timor. It will not be easy for the forces of occupation to go on concealing their military operations, even from uninformed tourists who go there only to enjoy the beaches.

The real face of Indonesian rule

Mr. Chairman, during the past few months, human rights violations have intensified. Last October and November, thousands of young Catholics were held briefly and many were brutally tortured. Most were released on condition that they report regularly to the authorities. Since April this year, there have been numerous arrests. Following the dozens of arrests in Baucau, many people were rounded up in Dili, Manatuto, Viqueque and other towns. The crackdown prompted the Jakarta-based Institute for the Defence of Human Rights to write to the armed forces commander-in-chief, General Try Soetrisno, asking for an explanation. H.C. Princen, chair of the Institute, has now written four times to senior army officers insisting on proper respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Indonesia's own procedural code in East Timor. None of his letters has been answered, nor have they been reported in the Indonesian press.

On the military front, Indonesian troops have, since November, been conducting a new strategy, first used in the archipelago by the Dutch colonial army in Aceh. The *benteng stelsel* or 'fortress' strategy requires a heavy concentration of Indonesian troops in a huge circle of army posts, to seal off an area believed to contain guerrilla bases. Inside, groups of East Timorese para-military troops, reinforced with more Indonesian troops, set up settlements from which to hunt down and capture resistance fighters. This strategy which is aimed at wearing down the resistance involves a huge and costly mobilisation of forces on the Indonesian side, including helicopters, OV-10 Broncos, ground-attack aircraft and naval vessels. In addition,

we know from a very reliable source that there are 30 territorial Indonesian troops stationed in each East Timorese village. The fact that Indonesia, faced with declining economic fortunes and a soaring foreign debt, is engaged in such an expensive military operation in East Timor is a measure of the resilience of East Timorese opposition to Indonesian rule. The forced mobilisation of Timorese is damaging food production, with menfolk away from home for months at a stretch. While Indonesian losses are known to be high, the armed resistance is also thought to be sustaining heavy casualties.

Mr Chairman, it is urgent for the UN to find a peace formula to bring an end to this war which is costing so much in human lives. Bishop Belo was not speaking lightly when he said, in his letter to UN Secretary General: "We continue to die as a people and a nation". Indonesian rule in East Timor is inhumane. It violates all internationally-accepted principles. It must be strongly denounced and the UN must turn its attention without delay to responding positively to Bishop Belo's plea for a plebiscite.

Thank you.